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ABSTRACT

The threats to adult higher education are rapidly becoming significant educational and social problems. To date, the hope of adult educators to become equal participants with other university divisions in higher education has not been realized. Simultaneous expansion and dilution of adult higher education have caused adult student demands for educational equality and cost sharing. In addition to student demands, a growing threat to adult higher education is the potential of being taken over by large corporations. Corporate interest in education comes at a time when universities find that their financial support is dwindling and that their major sources of support (government and business) are attempting to "decollegize" American society. Universities have responded by making education more relevant by offering vocational education and thus competing with the vocational programs of their major benefactors (corporate giants). Besides all the disadvantages universities have in this competition, they are moving away from their marketable commodity of academic credentials toward vocational ones. It is conceivable that universities might suffer if they became subsidiaries of large corporations by emphasizing vocational education. The loss of academic emphasis could have such a negative effect on the development of people's social consciousness as to be tragic. (EM)

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ADULT HIGHER EDUCATION: Thinking the Unthinkable

by

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Introduction

This paper will explore with compounded vision some of the threats to adult higher education and how they are rapidly becoming significant educational and social problems. Let us consider, for example, the decade of the 1960's when adult higher education--henceforth generally referred to as continuing education--was still an educational stepchild and when it was common practice to hire part-time faculty at low salaries, offer only courses that could meet arbitrary enrollments set by the university, allot insufficient budgets for staffing and operation, charge the continuing education divisions with disproportionate amounts for the use of university facilities, and stifle program expansions by denying reinvestment of continuing education's own generated capital. In short, the continuing education divisions had the almost impossible task of planning and operating educational programs and servicing a student population frequently larger than in any other university division but without the resources or assurances guaranteed "traditional" divisions. Yet, in spite of these difficulties, a great number of continuing education divisions and most of their programs succeeded in their existence.

Although during the Johnson Administration in the 1960's, enormous sums of money were pumped into higher education and concurrently there was increased

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support and acknowledged need by business and industry for continuing education, it was still required to take a back seat on most campuses and far from obtaining full partnership and a voice in the inner sanctum of the predominantly traditional universities. The hope of adult educators to become equal participants in higher education during the free spending years of the 1960's has yet to be fulfilled despite the gradual recession of the 1970's. The disappointment is poignantly illustrated by a dean of continuing education who said that all he had to do during the 1960's was to "break even financially" after being "overcharged for the use of university facilities," whereas in the 1970's, he not only must break even but make a "nine percent profit" as well. Stipulations such as these indicate a trend for increased financial demands on adult higher education in the future, demands which will undoubtedly shape the economic and educational policies for continuing education programs in parent universities. Furthermore, in view of the present precarious financial state of most universities, there is sufficient ground to suspect that even more economic pressure will be applied to the growing continuing education programs and their administrators.

Adult Student Role

Simultaneous expansion and dilution of adult higher education have not gone unnoticed by the adult students. They frequently complain about not getting their money's worth. They witness how in most universities the traditional students have access to certain educational priorities such as full-time high status faculty and greater variety in courses and programs for specialized study while they are confronted with frequent course cancellations, often

indifferent part-time faculty, and vocational training in many continuing education programs. As the enrollment of adult students increases and they begin to play a more critical role within the universities, it is unrealistic to assume that adult students will submit to the perpetuation of an educational double standard. Judging from student responses and behavior I have witnessed, threats from adult students could take on many forms. They may well go beyond a handful of students handing out leaflets to more direct actions these students know and understand from their more familiar environments of business and industry. For example, at one city university that exempts its traditional students from tuition while imposing tuition on its adult students, a group of adult students have moved in an attempt to bring a class action civil suit against the university to recover their tuition payments, claiming that they have already paid tuition as part of the city taxes like the rest of the citizens.

However, the threats from adult students demanding educational equality and cost sharing come at the awkward time when universities find themselves strapped to a declining traditional student population and shrinking revenue from federal, state, and private sources. For those universities whose financial solvency depends significantly upon the profits from their continuing education divisions, the threats come at an impossible time. The number of universities depending on continuing education revenues is difficult to determine. But just one continuing education administrator, for example, could name without hesitation eleven universities both public and private where friends in similar positions told him that their universities would not even be in business were it not for the profits from the continuing education divisions.

The Corporate Threat

While adult student demands may cause some difficulties to universities, they by no means are the only threat to adult higher education. The most consequential threat was pinpointed by Malcolm Knowles in 1969 and, given recent trends in education in general, it is perhaps the ultimate threat to education as we know it today. Knowles believed that adult higher education is on the verge of being taken over by large international corporations like I.T.T., I.B.M., R.C.A., C.B.S., Lear Siegler, Westinghouse, General Electric, Xerox, etc., when he stated:[1]

> During the past few years, scores of profit and nonprofit corporations, such as the National Training Laboratories-Institute of Applied Behavioral Sciences, the Sterling Institute, Leadership Resources, Inc., Eselen Institute, the American Management Association, and Kairos Institute, have found a thriving market for programs in leadership development, human relations training, business management, and other fields of study traditionally in the university domain.
>
> Clearly, the survival of higher adult education as a university function is threatened unless university policy-makers successfully resolve the issues now confronting them.

To understand the corporate interest in adult higher education, its potential market must be recognized. Philip Frandson forecasted in 1967 that adult higher education will "...go beyond its predicted future as merely the 'biggest business' in the field of education, to become the biggest business in the nation."[2]

It stands to reason that the potentially "biggest business in the nation" would attract the attention of the biggest corporations. Such a business opportunity could probably not have come at a better time for large corporations

usually interested in branching out in more diverse directions, preferably where antitrust suits are not a threat. Significantly enough, corporate interest in education comes not only at a time when universities find their financial support dwindling but also when the major sources of support--government and business--are attempting to "decollegize" American society. Both government and business have begun in recent years to view higher education as an overexpanded, underproductive but overproducing business pouring out graduates in such numbers that they cannot all be absorbed into the labor force. Such a view was expressed by the Regional Industrial Development Corporation in St. Louis, which represents collective business interests there and is now pressing for vocational rather than academic education in that city, in the following article in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch of November 21, 1971:

> Unfortunately, under current enrollments and programs, no more than 100,000 will graduate from vocational or technical programs in this area, Ross said.
>
> * * *
>
> Ross said that if industry could not find the manpower it required here it would go elsewhere.
>
> At the same time, he said, more graduates from high schools will find themselves unemployed because, "the demand for unskilled labor is drying up, and kids coming out of high school are unskilled."
>
> The consequences of such an imbalance, Ross said, would be slower economic growth, higher unemployment, higher welfare costs, a decline in public services, a decline in per capita income and the general standard of living.
>
> Ross said that a survey by the RIDC showed that most students and their parents were out of touch with the trends of jobs available.
>
> The majority believed that a college degree would automatically qualify them for employment.
>
> "This simply won't be the case," Ross said, noting that the percentage of total jobs held by college graduates had shrunk to 17 per cent nationally from 20 per

> cent a few years ago. He said the decline was expected to continue.
>
> "Industry will continue to need some people professionally trained, and of exceptional ability, but it will need to have increasingly more people who are technically trained," he said.
>
> Ross noted that vocational and technical education, or "career education" as it is now being called, was listed as a top priority of the Nixon Administration and the United States Office of Education. (Note the continuation of the stress on vocational education in the current Life-Long Learning Bill.)

Many universities have striven to meet the government and corporate "decollegizing" challenge by offering vocational education, thus making education more relevant. But they did not meet the challenge on their own but rather their challengers' terms. Many universities have legitimated their increasingly vocational curricula by calling them relevant and conferring vocational or career degrees. Some of the new degrees are called BACHELOR'S OF TECHNOLOGY, BACHELOR'S OF PUBLIC SERVICE, BACHELOR'S OF COMPUTER SCIENCE, etc. It remains yet to be seen whether or not these new degrees will be recognized by employers as legitimate academic degrees. Whatever, the emphasis on vocational rather than academic curricula has clearly emerged, a topic to be discussed later.

Benevolent Competitors

An unprecedented situation is developing within education in general as many universities have introduced vocational education and, at the same time, many international corporate giants, e.g. General Motors, I.T.T., and C.B.S., have been opening their own vocational schools while others, e.g. Boeing, Lockheed, Bell Telephone, have demonstrated an interest in public

schools at the primary and secondary level by bidding on performance contracts. Educational institutions are now competing with their major benefactors who, oddly enough, have been asked to curb and stipulate their donations to universities, according to an article in The New York Times of October 18, 1973:

> Corporations should no longer make unrestricted gifts to private education, David Packard, chairman of the Hewlett-Packard Company told a meeting of top level business leaders and elite university presidents yesterday.
>
> The former Deputy Secretary of Defense said that boards of trustees could no longer be counted on to spend the money in ways the corporation could defend to its stockholders.
>
> "Almost every board of trustees must have its members selected from a wide array of constituents: students, faculty, alumni, various ethnic groups, etc." Mr. Packard declared in a luncheon address sponsored by the Committee for Corporate Support of American Universities at the University Club.
>
> Formerly, most of the trustees of the major private universities were also corporate officers and their judgment could be trusted with unrestricted funds, he indicated.
>
> "Moreover, much of the power has gone to the faculty, and too often faculty decisions are determined by a militant minority of the faculty," he added.
>
> Mr. Packard said he was no longer convinced by the "bell cow theory" that the great private universities give distinctive leadership to all of higher education in America. He questioned whether trustees should "sit as sole judge of the social responsibility of each American corporation--and use this as a basis for deciding whether its stock should be held in the university portfolio?"
>
> He also alluded to "kicking R.O.T.C. programs off the campus...prohibiting business from recruiting on the campus" and said that a survey by an unnamed trustee showed that 90 per cent of students believe as they have been taught "that American corporations are evil and deserve to be brought under government control."
>
> Mr. Packard recommended that corporations support the leading private universities but give the funds for specified programs and to schools and departments

> which "also contribute in some specific way to our individual companies, or to the general welfare of our free enterprise system."

The fear of academic radicals often expressed by notorieties such as Mr. Packard has had a tremendous impact on the universities' benefactors. It resulted in a decrease in financial support to universities and benefited the corporations which have long been toying with the idea of starting their own schools. Hence, a peculiar situation has evolved in that the cutback in corporate contributions caused the universities to reduce their services while the corporate schools expanded theirs. Restated it means that corporations are in a better position to compete in the education business because their competitors, the universities, are in financial difficulty paradoxically and in part by fault of the corporations. I do not believe this to be a collusion but simply a side benefit to corporations.

The real clue to the corporate curb on donations to universities is not the boondoggle of academic radicals but rather the alteration of employee attitudes. Actually the real problem for corporations is that many graduates with a bachelor's degree do not like the corporate world of work and are reportedly unable to perform well in the predominantly narrow and alienating work in large corporations. Ivar Berg pointed out that there are ample research data to interpret whatever one wishes with respect to job satisfaction, alienation, and attitude toward the job. But he contends that in the areas of employee turnover and job performance, interpretation is not quite so academic, and that the data tend to show over and over again that a college graduate does not perform any better on a given job than an employee without a degree. In

fact, more often than not, employees without a degree perform their job tasks better and have a lower turnover rate, less absenteeism and higher productivity.[3] In the last ten years, business and industry have become aware that with college graduates they not only have a problem at the point of production but also with costs for salaries and wages since they earn more.

Managing Expectations

The pros and cons of job satisfaction, attitude toward work, and alienation will not be argued here, these questions being too academic. It can be argued, however, that since college graduates have higher job expectations and hold credentials which employers thus far have defined as important for employment, they are using these credentials to secure work they hope to be commensurately satisfying. And since job task requirements have remained about the same whereas educational requirements have increased, it should follow that high expectations yet lacking complexity in the job task frustrate college educated employees to the degree of low productivity, high absenteeism, high turnover, etc. It is these problems that advocates of vocational education promise to rectify and solve for business and industry, because it is this type of education that has the greatest potential of putting employment expectations in line with the reality of most current employment opportunities. Viewed in this light, it is understandable that large corporations would have a special interest in education in general and vocational education in particular. On one hand, vocational education has already proved to be a lucrative business and, on the other, a potential solution to some of the corporations'

most expensive and difficult problems of workers' expectations and wages. Neil H. Jacoby at the Graduate School of Business Administration at U.C.L.A., in dealing with larger social problems, proposed such a solution by suggesting that government be the logical choice in the management of reality:[4]

> Managing public expectations has become a vital new dimension of political leadership in the United States, of coordinate importance with the engineering of orderly reform of our social institutions. Political leaders need to observe expectation-reality gaps constantly in order to maintain the proper state of tension in society. The statesmen of the future will be those who know how to bring about orderly social change and also to keep public expectations in a productive relationship to realities. Thus they will enable our society to resolve successfully a constantly emerging set of new social problems.

Since government is tightly intertwined with corporate interests, it is not difficult to determine whose reality will be managed. Increasing pressure for vocational education from both government and corporations is a clear case in point. From the vantage point of corporations, vocational education should by definition not only manage people's reality psychologically but physically as well, in that it would lock people into the labor market while simultaneously lowering ultimate job expectations. Not many people with exclusively vocational education and training would probably aspire to a position on the executive level. To push it further, it is not very likely that with a vocational education they would switch from one type of occupation to another, e.g. from the shop floor to a business office.

Automation and Educational Obsolescence

Another aspect of vocational education is the vulnerability to structural unemployment, especially when automation changes the nature of work. It is

known, for example, that about 6,000 jobs are permanently automated out of existence each year.[5] And this trend is not reversing. It is predicted that continued automation will result in eventual unemployment of up to 90 percent of the labor force.[6] This is alarming in light of the fact that approximately one million new people enter annually the labor force and that by 1980, there will be an estimated 24.4 million more than in 1964.[7]

The rapidity with which particular inventions are accepted makes it difficult to foresee with any degree of certainty just what occupations will be affected by automation. However, some definite trends have emerged with regard to the amount of time it takes for new labor saving devices to be commercially and publicly adopted. Around the turn of the century (1890-1919), it took 37 years for an invention to become commercially developed; from 1920-1944, it dropped to 24 years; and from 1945-1964, to only 14 years.[8] This means hypothetically at least that a young person who presently enters the labor market, at the same time as an invention that eliminates the need for his training-related job, would face structural unemployment at about the age of 40 and <u>again</u> at the age of 55 in an unrelated occupation.

Accelerated development in automation creates an ideal prospect for the sellers of vocational education because it brings about assured obsolescence. For example, a person with vocational training will theoretically have the potential of becoming a consumer of vocational retraining at least three times in a normal lifetime. Furthermore, assuming that his expectations will have been managed, he will probably accept his structural unemployment as a personal failure for having made a poor vocational choice. Continuing

retraining will perhaps be considered normal by future generations just as we accept today as normal the purchasing of commodities we know were built for a life expectancy of only a few years. And, thinking the unthinkable, commonplace may someday be signs reading as follows: GOING-OUT-OF-TRAINING SALE; 50% OFF DURING THE AUGUST TRAINING SALE; TWO-FOR-THE-PRICE-OF-ONE TRAINING SALE; FAMILY RATES. The day may perhaps be closer than we dare think--depending on the rapidity and effectiveness of government and corporations in "decollegizing" American society. The following article in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch of November 21, 1971 reflects these trends:

> The music is monotonous and slow. The faces are bored, staring out the window or at the ceiling, anywhere but at the teacher droning on about medieval history.
>
> D. Reid Ross, executive vice president of the St. Louis Regional Industrial Development Corporation, is hoping many students will recognize that scene from a short movie now being circulated at high schools in the area.
>
> The point the movie makes is that much of the academic orientation of high schools is irrelevant to many students. It is an effort to unsell higher education.
>
> "We're trying to get across the idea that a college degree isn't the only way to achieve good earnings or to enjoy a rewarding career," Ross said.
>
> The RIDC is promoting a campaign to interest more high school students in vocational and technical education.
>
> The movie is part of a campaign in which about 200 corporation executives and representatives of chambers of commerce, service clubs and civic organizations, are visiting schools in an eight-county area of Missouri and Illinois.

Selling Education

While some corporations are expressing their interest in vocational education through local organizations such as RIDC, others are taking more direct

approaches to recruit students for their own schools. For example, an advertisement by Bell & Howell Schools was run in the November 1973 issue of Reader's Digest, immediately following an article titled, "Is There A Law That Says I Have To Go To College Next Fall?" The advertisement promises that by enrolling in the firm's home study school, a student not only learns electronics at home by building his own electronic test equipment one step at a time, at his own pace, but can also talk to his instructors in person on request and that when the course is finished, the student not only gets to keep the test equipment but also a color television set he will have built as part of his training. In addition, the school advertises the give-away of secrets about how to earn extra money part-time or start one's own business. Quite an attractive alternative to "having to go to college!"

In the last three years, I have with increasing interest been looking for and reading the national advertising campaigns of many corporations which have now moved into the education field. One advertisement that sticks particularly in my mind is dealing with a handsome young man who says on television that he has always found it difficult to memorize and learn skills from books--an obvious reference to the academic classroom setting--and that it is for this reason he chose to come to Balihi Computer School, as it offers the opportunity to learn right from the start by working on the computer. "Who is better equipped or qualified to teach about computers than Balihi?" he asks, "after all, they are the largest manufacturers of computers in the world." As a special attraction he adds that after he completed his course of study, Balihi, through their placement service and connections with the companies that buy their

computers, helped him find his present job which pays so well that he can drive a sports car. To end the advertisement, he takes the driver's seat next to a beautiful girl, saying "...if you're the kind of person who enjoys the good things in life and would like a well paying job in computer technology in such interesting fields as aerospace, medicine, design, then by all means come to Balihi. They can help you get the good things in life." And away he drives with the beautiful girl.

These kinds of advertisements are exceptional neither in thrust nor format. Some have been repeated over and over, several times a day, seven days a week on national television and the radio, and some appear consistently in the press and on matchbook covers, etc. While at first such advertising may appear innocent enough, let us scrutinize it against the backdrop of the direction in which adult higher education is headed in the credentials market. In my opinion, a corporation's enticement for a business venture in adult higher education lies in the following considerations: 1) Since adult higher education is a market that universities have demonstrated to be profitable, there is little risk in an attempt to capture it. 2) It is obviously to the corporations' advantage to sell the learning skills for their own products, i.e. for computer manufacturers to sell computer skills, automobile manufacturers to sell automobile engineering, electronics manufacturers to sell electronics, etc. 3) They can claim that as successful companies they have demonstrated their competence and know-how within an employable area of the market and are thus able to skillfully convey that knowledge to students. 4) Because of their facilities, only they can offer the advantage of teaching on-the-job, hands-on, while-you-learn, etc., as

opposed to a dry textbook or stuffy classroom. 5) Only they can offer personalized instruction by experts actually working in the field. 6) They are in a better position to help their graduates secure employment through contact with their customers, or help them start their own business. 7) They can confer vocational credentials that they make sure are recognized by other corporations. 8) With a national advertising agency already under contract, they practice little restraint in the most lucrative sales gimmicks, from the good life to sex appeal.

These corporate ambitions and claims are important enough to be compared with the vocationalism continuing education programs in universities have begun to offer. It is obvious from the outset that universities cannot compete on any of the above mentioned eight corporate advantages. Universities cannot call themselves manufacturers; they are not equipped or funded for employing on-the-job-training techniques; they cannot claim that their placement service will guarantee each student a suitable job; they cannot offer personalized instruction; they cannot credibly promise special bonuses such as girls, sports cars, television sets, etc.; they cannot even make the claim that they are the only educational institutions approved for veterans, a sanction given by the federal government to corporate vocational schools as well; and perhaps most importantly, they cannot be certain that their concept of vocational education whether at the pre or post-degree level be marketable. Furthermore, the lack of financial resources to enlist the aid of mass media advertising to form public opinion also makes an impact of considerable consequence on this educational contest.

Credentials: Academic vs Vocational

In addition to all the disadvantages universities have in the competition surrounding adult higher education, they are in significant numbers moving away from their only hitherto secure and marketable commodity of academic credentials to vocational ones. Just what distinguishes academic from vocational credentials? In recent years, academic degree programs have been infected with the ambiguous reputation of not preparing the students for any job task or, in other words, the real life. But while they entail no security for the proper performance of specific work assignments, they nevertheless supply some basic intellectual tools the graduate can apply in learning and performing specific employment skills. For example, Greek literature per se is usually inapplicable in a business occupation, inherent in it, however, is the method whereby the graduate learned to organize, theorize, project and interpret information. Such are precisely the skills that are occupationally transferable. Academic education should be thought of as a method and not a thing. On the other hand, vocational education is to give a specific body of knowledge within a relatively narrow subject field for a particular kind of employment. For example, vocationally certified computer technologists are not expected and probably even less hired to transfer that skill to the factory floor or the business offices. Of course, it can be argued that any type of education is transferable in the process of learning and mastering another skill. If I am insinuating the contrary, it is with the attempt to generalize in the manner most employers perceive the difference between academic and vocational credentials.

Summary

Thus far presented has been the direction in which I believe adult higher education is headed in the United States. But there is more to it, for the upsurge of corporate vocational schools coincides with the decline of higher education as a whole. If this trend is not reversed, it may not be long until a number of educational institutions are absorbed by corporations, and over their doors may well be inscribed,

Lower-Upperville College, a subsidiary of I.T.I.

The main survivors of such a corporate take-over would predictably be the elite private universities that have traditionally supplied government and corporate leadership. They would remain the educational training and socialization institutions for those to be initiated into the higher circles of leadership and control. Let me refer again to The New York Times article quoted earlier:

> Mr. Packard recommended that corporations support the leading private universities but give the funds for specified programs and to schools and departments which "also contribute in some specific way to our individual companies, or to the general welfare of our free enterprise system."

The clue lies obviously in his statement of "...leading private universities..." and the need for such educational institutions by government and corporations. Under these circumstances, other universities would be forced to either close or become centers for vocational training offering the kind of education that most junior colleges are now providing. In the framework of Burton Clark,[9] such training centers would have the function of "cooling-out discontent" or, in other words, of managing people's realities by bringing

their expectations in line with the job market. To put it more bluntly, innocent people would pay for their own lobotomies.

The prospect that universities might suffer if they became subsidiaries of large corporations emphasizing vocational education would not be as tragic as the effect it could have on the development of people's social consciousness. Education can and must be a liberating force pushing man toward perfection, making him face the contradictions and seek resolutions to those contradictions. I find the mere thought of managing people's reality outrageous. Vocational education would not lead to greater expectations but instead accomplish merely the economic purpose for which it would be institutionalized. It could ultimately result in reality management whereby people would learn to accept their fate, blame themselves for their failures, and perceive themselves as isolated cases rather than as part of a larger social environment. These people would not be able to perceive history as something they have the ability to make and create at their will, but they would rather perceive themselves as part of a history they must endure quietly.

The question remains whether or not adult students would accept such fate. Would they be willing to settle for exclusively vocational education? Would they be blind participants in the management of their reality and expectations? The attitudes expressed by many students enrolled in both regular academic and continuing education programs show that they are indeed buying, at this particular time, the relevancy of this education argument--not only from government and corporations but the educational institutions as well. In fact, many universities have begun to openly stress that education should

be made more relevant, i.e. vocational. It has become clear that presently a large amount of students perceive the university as a business first and an educational institution second. There is a growing number of students who express their dissatisfaction with higher education in economic terms--they do not get what they pay for. Both parents and students seem to increasingly blame the universities when they discover that their expectations were not met occupationally. Perhaps with only a little more advertising by corporations, still more people will begin to look for business interests to satisfy what they perceive as educational needs.

There are many communities that have already turned to corporations for their educational needs by awarding them performance contracts for their public schools. At this moment in time, there appears to be great willingness among the public in its blind effort to cooperate with government, business, and educational institutions to dehumanize man by making him fit the production process instead of making the production process fit man.

Although it appears to be the most imminent target, it is not only adult higher education that is at stake but also what is left of the liberal academic tradition and what potential higher education in general affords man to come to grips with his existence. After all, there is a dream and vision of man expressed and locked in the "useless" academic pursuits of literature, art, drama, classics, medieval history, philosophy, and the utopian humanistic efforts of the social sciences, a dream and vision in danger of being lost.

FOOTNOTES

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